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**LESSON TITLE:**

## Decision Making at the Neilson House

**Course:** History of the United States and New York State (Social Studies)

**Grade Level:** Middle School (6th through 8th Grade)

**Time:** 45 minutes

**Developed by:** Peter Arruda, Cobleskill-Richmondville Central School District

### Funding Acknowledgment

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### Lesson Objective:

Students will be able to assess the items contained within the Neilson House and evaluate whether Benedict Arnold and Enoch Poor had what they needed to make effective command decisions during the Battles of Saratoga.

### NYS Social Studies Standards:

This lesson is directly linked with NYS K-8 Social Studies Framework Standard 7.3d (Indicator #2):

- Students will examine the strategic importance of the New York colony. Students will examine the American victory at the Battle of Saratoga in terms of its effects on American and British morale and on European views on American prospects for victory in the Revolution.

### NYS Next Generation Learning Standards for Literacy:

This lesson is directly aligned with two NYS Next Generation Learning Standards for Literacy:

- Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts. (NYS Reading Standard RH7 in History/Social Studies for grades 6-8).
- Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant, accurate data and evidence that demonstrate an understanding of the topic by identifying and using credible sources (NYS Writing Standard WHST1b in History/Social Studies for grades 6-8).

### Prior to this lesson:

Before completing this lesson, students will have compared the British and Continental Armies, highlighting the difference in leadership, training, supplies, and most importantly, what each is fighting for. This learning contributes to this lesson in the sense that it provides students with a framework for the War of Independence. Further, students should have already completed the first lesson in this series as it provides a better overview and greater understanding for how the decisions made at the Battle of Saratoga impact the outcome of the War for Independence.

This lesson serves as a digital complement to an on-site visit to Saratoga National Historical Park. It can be completed either in preparation for, in reflection of, or as an alternative to a physical trip to the park.



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## Procedure:

1. Students should begin the lesson by completing the “Do Now” prompt independently. After sufficient time to think and write, student volunteers should be selected share their responses. Following some discussion, the teacher should note that soldiers on both sides of the American Revolutionary War often had to live without those items they previously felt were necessary in their lives. However, commanding officers in both armies were granted certain luxuries and comfort because they held an important responsibility—decision making! (~5 to 7 minutes).
2. Next, students will be divided into groups of three or four. Students will then be asked to brainstorm a short list of items they would need if traveling away from home specifically focusing on the items that they might need to make important decisions. Though participating in small group brainstorming, each student will individually list the item and record why he or she feels life away from home would be difficult without that item. At the end of the brainstorming session, groups will rank the items they think are most important for effective decision making away from home. (~10 to 12 minutes).
3. Next the teacher will instruct students to log on to their devices and access the 360° Virtual Tour of the Neilson House. As students explore the Neilson House and work with their small group, students will look to identify items within the Neilson House that made decision making easier for the commanding officers quartered there. After identifying each item, students will be asked to describe why it would be difficult for the officers to make effective decisions without the item AND how the item is different today. After sufficient time, student volunteers should be selected from the groups to share their responses (~15 to 18 minutes).  
**Teacher Note:** Clarify for students that the items they will see inside the Neilson House are high-quality copies of original artifacts from the time period. They represent the same types of items the generals would have had, or probably had, with them.
4. After some discussion, students should focus their attention on the final writing prompt. For this final assessment, students should be individually considering the items Benedict Arnold and Enoch Poor had in the Neilson House, whether there were any important items that were lacking, and evaluating whether the officers had what they needed to make effective battlefield decisions.

## Lesson Alterations and Accommodations:

There are several alterations that could be applied to this lesson as the teacher sees fit to adjust for time or student ability. First, the “Do Now Prompt” could be completed prior to the lesson as a homework assignment in anticipation of the discussion. Further, the final assessment could be completed outside of the classroom to be turned in later. In a smaller class setting, or a class setting in which students do not have individual devices to use when exploring the 360° Neilson House tour, it is recommended that the teacher lead students through the tour using a Smartboard or projector, stopping, and reading aloud significant items on the tour that pertain to the objective of the lesson.



**Assessment:**

The summative assessment for this lesson consists of a final writing task. In this task, students evaluate whether Benedict Arnold and Enoch Poor had what they needed to make effective battlefield decisions. Students complete this evaluation based upon their observations exploring the 360° Virtual Tour of the Neilson House at Saratoga National Historic Park. Grading guidelines are as followed:

Student makes a clear claim that is well supported using both evidence from the 360° Virtual Tour of the Neilson House and reasoning that connects the artifacts to effective decision making on the 18th century battlefield.	4pts
Student makes a claim that is supported using some evidence/reasoning from the 360° Virtual Tour of the Neilson House. Writing demonstrates an understanding of the items required to make effective battlefield decisions in the 18th century.	3pts
Student makes a claim but uses only limited evidence/reasoning from the 360° Virtual Tour of the Neilson House. Writing shows some understanding of the items required to make effective battlefield decisions in the 18th century.	2pts
Student's writing may be missing a clear claim and/or claim lacks evidence/reasoning from the 360° Virtual Tour of the Neilson House. Writing shows only a limited understanding of the items required to make effective battlefield decisions in the 18th century.	1pt
Student does not provide a claim related to the writing task. Evidence/reasoning related to the 360° Virtual Tour of the Neilson House is missing. An understanding of the items required to make effective battlefield decisions in the 18th century is absent.	0pts



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NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## Decision Making at the Neilson House



John Neilson Farmhouse

Credit: National Park Service

### Do Now Prompt:

What is something in your life that you could not live without? Explain.

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## DECISION MAKING AT THE NEILSON HOUSE

### Group Brainstorm:

What things might you want if you needed to make an important decision while traveling away from home? What items are needed for rest and comfort while traveling? What things are needed to stay in touch with others? What else would you take with you if you were leaving home for an extended period?

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**Item #1** \_\_\_\_\_

Why would life away from home be difficult without this item?

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**Item #2** \_\_\_\_\_

Why would life away from home be difficult without this item?

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**Item #3** \_\_\_\_\_

Why would life away from home be difficult without this item?

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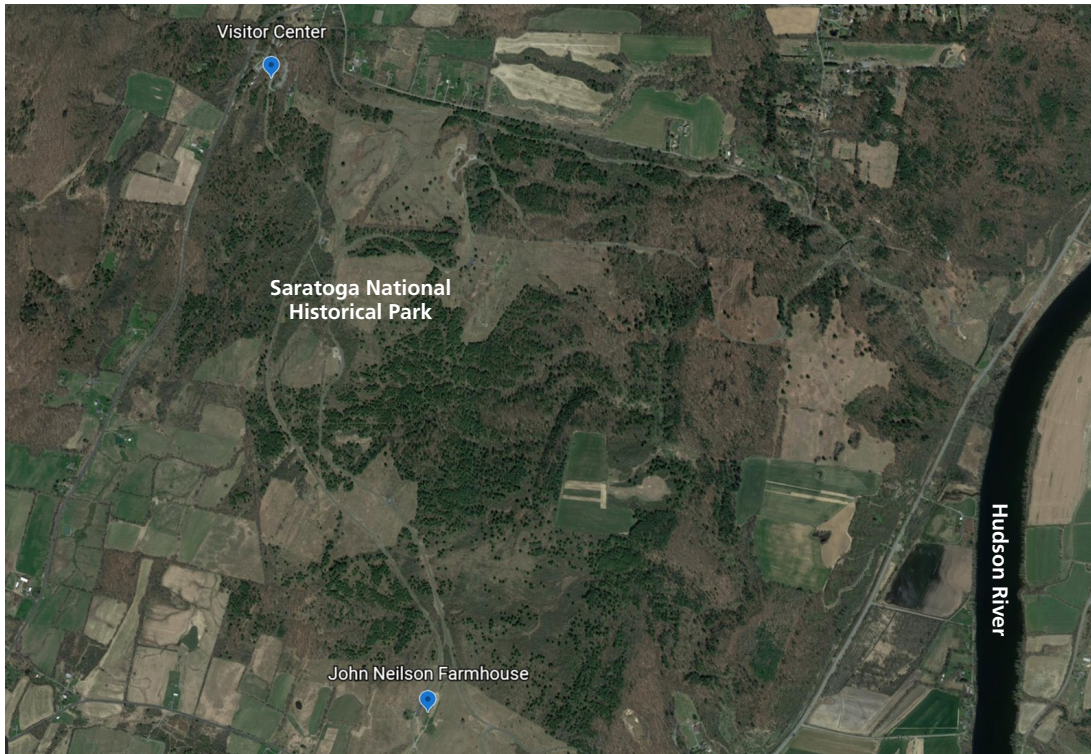
Of the three items your group brainstormed above, rank which items would be most important for effective decision making while away from home (with #1 being most important).

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_



## Exploring the Neilson House

<https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=Nq9d3P5WEKK>



Google Earth image of Saratoga National Historical Park, showing location of the John Neilson Farmhouse

Built by John and Lydia Neilson between 1775 and 1777, the Neilson House is a small red farmhouse that stands at “the summit” west of Bemus Heights on the Saratoga Battlefield. Aware of British General John Burgoyne’s movements south toward Albany, John and Lydia Neilson packed up their belongings and fled to the home of relatives in Stillwater. Occupying the empty house on September 12th, 1777, the Neilson House became headquarters to American Generals Benedict Arnold and Enoch Poor during the battle. The house stood strategically inland from the Hudson River at the western limit of the American fortifications.

Keep in mind their commander, General Horatio Gates, had his headquarters even farther behind the American lines, just south of Neilson House. As general over the whole American army here, he, too, would have needed items such as these for his comfort and ability to command the entire army.

As you explore around the Neilson House, read about the items the officers brought with them and what they were used for. In the spaces below, identify what items they had to bring to make decisions on the battlefield easier. What items did they need for rest and comfort while away from home? What things were needed to communicate with others?

